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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF EDUCATION OUTLINES REFORM AGENDA

¶1. SUMMARY: On September 11, Ambassador John Campbell met with Minister of Education, Obiageli Ezekwesili, to discuss sweeping reforms to the education sector. Though funding remains its principal obstacle, Ezekwesili's reform agenda includes replacement of all department heads of the Ministry of Education, &cleaning-up8 the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and committing petroleum funds and other resources to teacher training and recruitment, curriculum and classroom modernization, and increased digging of boreholes in the North. END SUMMARY.

¶2. BACKGROUND: Obiageli Ezekwesili earned the nickname &Madame Due Process8 from her time spent reviewing government contracts in the President,s Budget Monitoring Intelligence Unit (BMIU). Known for her transparency, honesty, personal and professional integrity, and reform agenda aimed at bringing in line GON units under her charge to an international standard of effectiveness, Ezekwesili assumed duty as Minister of Education in June 2006 following a stint as Minister of Solid Minerals, where she spearheaded major reforms in policy development and implementation. Ezekwesili promises to breathe new life into the slow, inefficient Ministry of Education, formerly staffed with &old timers8 uninterested or reluctant to initiate reforms.

¶3. Notably, Ezekwesili,s appointment as Minister is viewed as President Obasanjo,s delivery on his commitment to introduce true reforms in the education sector. END BACKGROUND.

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EZEKESILI,S REFORM AGENDA  
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¶4. Ezekwesili outlined an ambitious multi-tiered education sector reform program, including the reshuffling and replacement of Ministry of Education department heads with young, highly educated, private sector-minded professionals. While reform efforts focus on developing a more robust policy architecture through &cleaning-up8 the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) ) a heavily-funded Ministry parastatal in charge of implementing basic education in Nigeria ) and halving the current set of 26 Ministry parastatals, the principal setback to implementation remains funding. In view of this, Ezekwesili proposed allocating about 2% (N32 billion) of the nation,s petroleum income to fund UBEC, with N15 billion of that going directly to State governments. She stressed the obvious need to ensure transparency in the disbursement of funds by obligating States to furnish a disaggregated budget and expenditure report. Local communities, Ezekwesili noted, must be encouraged to participate actively in funding decisions and given the opportunity to receive matching grants from UBEC for initiatives that directly benefit schools.

¶5. With respect to curriculum and classroom modernization,

Ezekwesili opined that in order for Nigerians to meet the demands of the 21st century, all levels of education need upgrading. Since only 10% of secondary school graduates presently go on to either higher education or employment in Nigeria, schools must be equipped with requisite access to information technology. Importantly, she announced a pivotal program to revamp teacher pre-service and in-service training to focus on improved content knowledge and cutting-edge practices in class management and pedagogy. In order to attract and retain qualified teachers to work in challenging locations, Ezekwesili is exploring avenues to increase compensation and incentives.

¶6. In an attempt to ensure the ability of girls to attend primary school, particularly in areas where attitudinal challenges to girl education persist, Ezekwesili proposed increasing the number of female teachers and placing boreholes within school compounds in the North. Locating boreholes within school compounds makes available water for use in the school (toilets, hydration, and hygiene) and for use by the community. While the Ministry has funds for construction, Ezekwesili solicited USG equipment assistance in digging the boreholes. Ezekwesili explained that funds from recent debt relief agreements will be used for the acquisition of text books in the four core subjects of Mathematics, English, Basic Technology, and the Integrated Sciences for schools in the Girls Education Project states (located in the 19 Northern states).

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